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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI IMMEDIATE
SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6609
INFO ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
NSC WASHDC
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
SECDEF WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T RANGOON 000954

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: GAMBARI DEPARTS BURMA, ACTIVIST SEEKS ASYLUM

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: UN Special Envoy Gambari reportedly met with Senior General Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi before departing Burma today on a Silk Air flight. He provided no outbriefing to the diplomatic corps. A prominent pro-democracy activist and key organizer of last week's demonstrations has taken refuge at UN offices in Rangoon and is requesting USG assistance after he escapes over the Thai border (see action request for Chiang Mai in paragraph 5). Most businesses and schools reopened today in Rangoon as life began to return to a semblance of normal. End Summary.

Gambari Incommunicado

¶2. (SBU) Gambari reportedly met with Senior General Than Shwe in Nay Pyi Taw today, after which he returned to Rangoon and met once again with Aung San Suu Kyi. UN officials in Rangoon told us that Gambari and UN Resident Coordinator Charles Petrie had been incommunicado since they returned to Nay Pyi Taw on Monday evening and they had no information regarding the outcome of his meetings there. We have received press reports Gambari was taken to Lashio, Shan State yesterday to meet with European academics and Burmese government officials there conducting Track II talks. UNDP told us definitively that Gambari would not debrief the diplomatic corps before his departure today, so we cannot provide any information about his meetings in Nay Pyi Taw and with ASSK.

Prominent Activist Requests Asylum with UN and U.S.
Assistance in Thailand

¶3. (S/NF) Early this morning UNDP External Affairs Officer Elizabeth Moorthy informed pol/econ chief that one of the key organizers of the recent pro-democracy protests was at UNDP headquarters requesting political asylum. The activist, Aung Way, is a well-known Burmese poet who was a key organizer of last week's demonstrations along with the famous comedian Zaganar and the actor and social activist Kyaw Thu. Zaganar has been arrested and Kyaw Thu has gone into hiding. Moorthy told us Aung Way had plans to depart for the Thai border, and requested U.S. assistance once he crossed the border. According to Moorthy, and UK and Norwegian poloffs who were also present at the meeting, neither the UN nor the UK or Norwegian Governments would be able to provide assistance to

Aung Way when he reached Thailand due to Thai restrictions on the status of Burmese refugees that reached Thailand. Moorthy also requested to move Aung Way to the U.S. Embassy until he could depart Rangoon. When asked why Aung Way could not continue to stay at UN headquarters, Moorthy reported that both UN Resident Coordinator Charles Petrie and UN Envoy Gambari were reluctant to have him there because the "immunity of the UN was much weaker than that of a foreign embassy compound."

¶4. (S/NF) Pol/econ chief advised that a U.S. decision to provide temporary shelter to Aung Way would require moving Aung Way, putting him at risk of notice and discovery by Burmese authorities who are closely watching all USG employees and buildings. Such a decision would also require coordination with Washington where U.S. officials would not react positively toward UN reluctance to provide shelter to a prominent pro-democracy activist fleeing arrest and possible torture. Deputy Resident Coordinator Sanaka Samarasingha spoke up to say he had not thought of this possibility and would consult with Charles Petrie and Gambari before proceeding with the request to transfer Aung Way to the U.S. Embassy. He speculated the UN would keep Aung Way for the time being.

¶5. (S/NF) Action Requested: Pol/econ chief informed Samarasingha and Moorthy that Embassy Rangoon would provide any assistance it could to help Aung Way reach the border and would coordinate with the UN, U.S. Embassy Bangkok, and ConGen Chiang Mai to meet Aung Way after he crossed the Thai

border to provide him assistance there. Pol/econ chief then spoke with Aung Way who said he planned to travel by train to Loikaw in Kayah State where he would disguise himself as a bus attendant and continue to the Thai Border. He said he would contact Dr. Lun Swe, a physician at Dr. Cynthia's clinic in Mae Sot, after reaching Loikaw. He recommended that ConGen Chiang Mai work through Dr. Lun Swe to coordinate plans for assisting him after his arrival in Thailand. UNDP will notify us when Aung Way has finalized his plans for departure.

Rumors Continue

¶6. (C) Rumors regarding military defections continue, although none appear to be credible at this time. Reports of a Burmese Lieutenant Colonel named Hla Win who deserted his post in protest of the regime's harsh tactics and described several thousands of corpses appear to be unfounded. According to the Norwegian pollster, this story has been spread by a German expat journalist, who the Norwegians regard as lacking credibility. To add to the confusion, reports continue in exile circles that Rangoon Commander Major General Hla Htay Win has been removed from his command for refusing to give orders to shoot at unarmed demonstrators and monks. We have been unable to verify this rumor although our DATT heard from sources in Thailand today that MG Hla Htay Win may have been relieved because of the shooting of the Japanese photographer.

Activists Vow to Continue, Life Slowly Returning to Normal

¶7. (C) 88 Generation Students Activist Toe Kyaw Hlaing met with pol/econ chief yesterday to inform us the pro-democracy movement, as weakened as it might be, will continue. The activists will attempt to regroup and strategize to capitalize on public anger over the military's brutal crackdown. More people were out on the streets again as schools and businesses reopened. Some monasteries continued to be barricaded but many more were open today. However, we have seen very few monks on the street. Several local journals have shut down publication, reportedly because they refuse to print the regime's propaganda that the protests were organized by "terrorists."

Comment

18. (C) We do not want to pronounce Gambari's visit a failure before hearing from him. However, it appears that he has only done what the military authorities permitted him, which comes as no surprise. Therefore, we doubt this visit, like his others, will yield any significant compromise from Than Shwe. The generals have successfully quashed the activists, the Buddhist clergy, and the civilians who bravely came out to support them. Why would they yield to outside pressure now? End Comment.

VILLAROSA